

Message Text

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PGOV, JO, US, XF

SUBJECT: COURT CHIEF SHARAF - REACTION TO BEGIN PROPOSALS

1. SHARAF SAW ME EARLY EVENING OF DECEMBER 28 AND OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY DISCUSSING ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S ADDRESS IN THE KNESSET TODAY. HE SAID HE HAD SEEN FULL TEXT OF STATEMENT AND HEARD IT IN ARABIC ON ISRAELI RADIO AS IT WAS DELIVERED. HE CHARACTERIZED THE SPEECH AND THE PROPOSAL AS A DISASTER AND A NON-STARTER. HE RECALLED THAT THE US HAD PUBLICLY, OR SO HE SAYS, CALLED THE ALLON PLAN WHEN ORIGINALLY PROPOSED A NON-STARTER AS WELL.

2. I PURSUED THE QUESTION WITH SHARAF, WHO IS NORMALLY TEMPERATE AND MEASURED IN HIS COMMENTS, POINTING OUT THE DISTANCE WHICH BEGIN HAD MOVED AND THE OBVIOUS HEAVY PRESSURE HE WAS GETTING FROM HIS COLLEAGUES IN THE LIKUD, HE SHOULD SEE THE

SPEECH IN THAT LIGHT. SHARAF SAID THAT THE MOST DAMAGING PART OF THE BEGIN STATEMENT WAS HIS ASSERTION, HOWEVER CAREFULLY PHRASED, THAT THE US ADMINISTRATION COMPLETELY SUPPORTED HIS PROPOSALS. I POINTED OUT THAT BEGIN HIMSELF HAD BEEN CAREFUL TO MAKE CLEAR ONLY OUR SUPPORT FOR THEM AS A "FAIR BASIS" FOR

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NEGOTIATIONS. SHARAF SAID NO ONE IN THE ARAB WORLD WILL UNDERSTAND THE NUANCE AND INDEED NO ONE BELIEVES THEY CONSTITUTE A FAIR BASIS SINCE THEY IGNORE COMPLETELY THE ISSUE OF TERRITORY AND MERELY PERPETUATE THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION. SHARAF SAID HE IS VERY DEEPLY CONCERNED THAT THE ISSUE WILL IRREVOCABLY DAMAGE SADAT WHOSE EFFORTS HE AND KING PERSONALLY SUPPORT. INDEED, HE SAID, HE HAD SPENT FIVE HOURS WITH ASAD YESTERDAY (SEPTEL),

TWO OF THEM VIGOROUSLY SUPPORTING SADAT AND HIS INITIATIVES. HE THOUGHT IT WAS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY FOR THE US TO SPEAK OUT CLEARLY ON THE BEGIN PROPOSALS AND CLARIFY NATURE OF OUR SUPPORT. HE WENT ON TO SUGGEST THAT WE SHOULD CALL THEM "NON-STARTERS." I SAID THIS WOULD BE ENORMOUSLY DAMAGING TO BEGIN AND BELIEVE THE REAL MOVEMENT HE HAD MADE. WHAT WAS IMPORTANT NOW WAS TO KEEP THE PROCESS GOING FORWARD. AFTER EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION, SHARAF SAID THAT WHAT IT REALLY COMES TO IS THAT THE UNITED STATES IS NOW SEEN IN THE ARAB WORLD AS FULLY SUPPORTING THE BEGIN PROPOSALS. THIS IS VERY DAMAGING TO SADAT AND TO ALL WHO WANT TO SUPPORT HIM. THE LEAST THE U.S. CAN DO IS TO INDICATE THAT THE BEGIN PROPOSALS, WHERE THEY LEAD TO OR ARE SUPPORTIVE OF US POSITIONS SUCH AS SELF DETERMINATION AND RETURN TO THE 1967 FRONTIERS WITH MINOR RECTIFICATIONS, ARE SUPPORTIVE OF A FAIR PEACE AND WHERE THEY DO NOT DEAL WITH THAT ISSUE, THE US CONSIDERS THEY ARE NOT SUPPORTIVE OF THE PEACE EFFORT.

3. SHARAF ASKED ME TO PASS THESE VIEWS TO YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE WITH THE HOPE THAT YOU OR THE PRESIDENT WOULD MAKE A STATEMENT IN THE NEXT DAY OR SO, PERHAPS AT THE PRESIDENT'S INTENDED WARSAW PRESS CONFERENCE, CLARIFYING OUR VIEWS ON AND NATURE OF OUR SUPPORT FOR THE BEGIN PROPOSALS. OTHERWISE, THOSE ARABS SUPPORTING SADAT WILL LOSE HEART THAT THE US IS BEHIND A FAIR AND COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT AND ASSUME WE ARE PULLING THE RUG OUT FROM UNDER HIM, WHILE THE REJECTIONISTS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS, THOSE WHO "ALWAYS BELIEVED" BEGIN WOULD NEVER OFFER
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ANYTHING GENUINE, WILL BE RECONFIRMED IN THE CORRECTNESS OF THEIR VIEWS AND REDOUBLE THE ATTACK.

4. COMMENT: SHARAF IS NORMALLY CALM AND COLLECTED. HE WAS SO TONIGHT, BUT HE HAD REALLY NOTHING POSITIVE TO SAY ABOUT THE PROPOSALS BEGIN UNFOLDED TODAY OR THE STATEMENT PRESENTING THEM AND FELT BEGIN HAD DONE AN EFFECTIVE JOB IN CONVINCING THE ARABS HE HAD FULL US SUPPORT. SHARAF BELIEVES THAT THE US NOW FACES A SERIOUS CRUNCH POINT IN ITS EFFORTS TOWARD A MIDDLE EAST PEACE AND THAT IT CAN NO LONGER AVOID SPEAKING OUT AND REARTICULATING ITS OWN POSITION. SHARAF SAYS HE DOES NOT BELIEVE THAT BEGIN CAN EVER REALLY MOVE IN A SIGNIFICANT WAY ON THE WEST BANK, BUT THAT WE NEED TO SPEAK OUT TO KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING AND GIVE NEGOTIATIONS A CHANCE. FOR ALL TOO LONG THE US HAS SAID THAT IF THE ARABS WILL SIT DOWN WITH THE ISRAELIS IT CAN ALL BE WORKED OUT. RIGHT NOW HE REMAINS HIGHLY SKEPTICAL THAT WITHOUT OUR HELP IT WILL MOVE ANYWHERE. SHARAF NORMALLY REFLECTS VIEWS CLOSE TO HUSSEIN'S. I SUSPECT THAT KING'S OWN PESSIMISM WILL CAUSE HIM MORE ANGUISH THAN SHARAF CURRENTLY SHOWS; THAT HIS POLITENESS WILL MUTE HIS PHRASING OF HIS CONCERNS. THIS VIEW IS PASSED ON BECAUSE IT COMES FROM A MODERATE LEADER, SUPPORTIVE OF SADAT, OF A TRADITIONALLY MODERATE STATE.

I RECOMMEND WE TAKE SHARAF'S CONCERNS AND ADVICE MOST SERIOUSLY.
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